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**STATEMENT OF
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OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
OF THE
HOUSE VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
ON
A REVIEW OF THE INTERAGENCY TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM
AND THE NEED FOR ENHANCED OUTCOME MEASUREMENTS**

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Introduction

Chairman Arrington, Ranking Member O'Rourke, and distinguished members of this subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to testify about the Navy Transition Assistance Program (TAP), and our efforts to seamlessly transition Sailors to civilian life, employment, further education, or entrepreneurship.

In fiscal year 2017, approximately 32,000 Sailors transitioned out of the Navy, and these numbers are likely to be comparable over the next several years. Navy is an expeditionary force that routinely deploys. Our Sailors serve in diverse career fields, among them, Navy Special Warfare, air traffic control, health care, advanced electronics, and nuclear power. Civilian employers routinely pursue Sailors as potential employees because of the world-class training and skills they obtain in the Navy, even as we offer incentives to retain these Sailors who possess critical skills needed to ensure fleet readiness. For both active and reserve component Sailors who separate, demobilize, or retire from the Navy, we offer a robust TAP to help them make a seamless transition to life beyond the Navy.

Transition Assistance Program

Navy delivers TAP in collaboration with the Office of the Secretary of Defense; the Departments of Labor, Education, Veterans Affairs, Homeland Security; the Small Business Administration and the Office of Personnel Management. TAP includes the following elements:

1) *Career Readiness Standards (CRS)* – A set of common, discreet, and measurable, transition “readiness” standards for Sailors to meet prior to separation. The desired end-state is for each Sailor to meet CRS for his/her chosen civilian career path and to complete a viable Individual Transition Plan (ITP) prior to departure from active duty. These standards are designed to increase each Sailor’s abilities to successfully overcome any challenges they may face in pursuit of choosing a career path.

2) *Transition GPS (Goals, Plans, Success) Core Workshop Curriculum* – A series of training that includes the Department of Labor (DoL) Employment Workshop (DoLEW), Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Benefits Briefings, Financial Education, Military Occupational Code Crosswalk, Family/Special Issues, and an ITP review. Additionally, participants may select to attend two-day training tracks in Accessing Higher Education, Entrepreneurship, or Technical Training.

3) *Military Life Cycle* – Incorporates preparation for Sailors’ career transition throughout their military service – from accession through transition from the Navy and reintegration into civilian life. Today’s transitioning Sailors are better prepared to transition to civilian life because of the continuing integration of this model.

4) *Capstone Event* – A forum provided for Service members to validate CRS are met, and to refer members, as needed, for additional training or assistance prior to separation or retirement.

Navy officials continue to work with representatives from the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), the other Uniformed Services, and interagency partners, to evaluate and improve TAP. Sailors are encouraged to begin the transition process approximately 24-months, but no later than, 12-months prior to separation. During this period, each transitioning Sailor participates in mandatory pre-separation counseling (10 U.S. Code §1142) that introduces them to the various programs and services available to assist them.

Navy provides the five-day *Transition GPS* Workshop at installations world-wide via our Fleet and Family Support Centers. *Transition GPS* Workshops may be tailored to the installation population or demographics of the class (e.g., retirees, seniority). Additionally, Fleet and Family Support Centers provide both individual and group transition counseling, career planning, résumé-writing and other transition-related workshops.

Navy Fleet and Family Support Centers also conduct first-term and mid-career workshops through the Career Options and Navy Skills Evaluation Program (CONSEP). This modular two-day course is designed to assist active duty service members in achieving Navy, and future civilian, career goals. Training topics provide vital information across the Military Life Cycle on career-making decisions, upward mobility, Veterans benefits while on active duty, college and certification opportunities, apprenticeships, and financial management and investment strategies, which enhance the Sailor's ability to achieve personal and professional success.

Navy Transition Assistance Core Workshop Curriculum

The mandatory Navy *Transition GPS* Core Workshop is a five-day curriculum. For the typical workshop, on day one, Navy transition staff covers the following topics:

1) Transition Assistance Overview: Includes a Welcome Address / Workshop Schedule-of-Activities, Topics for Family Considerations/Special Issues, the Value of a Mentor, and a review of available Fleet and Family Support Services.

2) Military Occupational Code (MOC) Crosswalk: Upon completing the MOC Crosswalk module, Sailors are provided documentation of their military career experience and skills; translation of their military occupation experience to civilian sector skills; and identification of gaps in their training and/or experience that need to be filled to meet their personal career goals. The MOC Crosswalk enables Sailors to develop a clear line-of-sight between their military skills and training and career fields of their choice.

3) Financial Planning: The financial planning module prepares Sailors to build an integrated 12-month budget that reflects post-military employment, education, or training goals. Financial planning counselors are available for follow-up counseling, if requested by the Sailor.

Typically, on days two through four, the Department of Labor (DoL) delivers the approved Employment Workshop, while, on day five, the Department of Veterans of Affairs (VA) conducts VA Benefits I and II briefings. Each installation has the discretion to present

TAP briefings in a sequence that best suits transitioning Sailors on their installation. During the workshop, Sailors also review progress on their Individual Transition Plans. Navy continues to improve our classroom delivery experience. We provide *Transition GPS* computer software and enhanced WiFi capability, greatly improving the classroom experience. In fiscal year 2017, Navy began replacing all 2,493 *Transition GPS* computers with updated models, which run faster and have extended battery life. Along with the computer refresh, all information-technology equipment is being updated as needed including WiFi capacity, routers, scanners, printers, and associated equipment. This upgrade, which is 90 percent complete, will ensure Sailors have a real-time resource in the classroom to research job, education, and other transition-related opportunities.

We continue to expand and adjust our delivery approach to accommodate Sailors in isolated locations by providing, in collaboration with VA and DoL, in-person *Transition GPS* classes at Naval Support Activity, Souda Bay, Crete; and Naval Fleet Activities, Chinhae, Korea. For deployed units with limited bandwidth, we recently received approval to have the Joint Knowledge Online virtual curriculum available on the Navy eLearning shipboard servers.

Education, Technical Training, and Entrepreneur Workshops

In addition to completing the *Transition GPS* Core Curriculum, transitioning Sailors may also participate in a series of two-day tailored workshops which address three alternative tracks available within the *Transition GPS* curriculum:

- (1) Accessing Higher Education track, for those pursuing an advanced education degree;
- (2) Technical Training track, for those seeking job-ready skills and industry-recognized credentials in shorter-term training programs; and
- (3) Entrepreneurship track, for those planning to start a business.

Navy Capstone Event

At least 90 days before separating from the Navy, Sailors are required to participate in a Navy-hosted *Capstone Event*, to validate the process, and verify that they have completed the *Transition GPS* curriculum and achieved Career Readiness Standards (CRS). Staff also reviews potential challenges Sailors may face as veterans, and available tools and resources transitioning Sailors learned about in *Transition GPS* workshops. Sailors requiring additional assistance are referred to supplemental training opportunities.

Additionally, through the *Capstone Event*, all Sailors are referred to appropriate government agencies and organizations that will provide them with continued benefits, services, and support in their new capacity as Navy veterans, including completion of CRS, if they are not fully accomplished prior to separation. While beneficial for all transitioning Sailors, this is particularly instrumental in supporting at-risk Sailors, such as those subject to rapid or involuntarily separation.

Commander Support and Accountability

Using the Navy Retention Monitoring System (NRMS) Analytics, and the current Career Information Management System (CIMS), commanders can track and monitor their own transition assistance program compliance. These systems provide commanders the capability to report and analyze active and reserve, officer and enlisted, *Transition GPS* data via ad hoc and standardized reports down to the unit level. Most importantly, the fleet has included TAP compliance as a criterion for the annual “Golden Anchor” retention award, which recognizes commands with exceptional Sailor retention programs.

Guidance and Training

Navy leverages an extensive professional network to keep the fleet informed about new policy changes and *Transition GPS* implementation challenges. TAP staff work with fleet engagement teams to coordinate with, and provide training to, Command Career Counselors worldwide on procedures, policies, new aspects of *Transition GPS*, and TAP reporting requirements, to ensure Sailors are afforded a viable plan for transition to civilian life. Coordinating efforts with Fleet and Force Career Counselors, Navy also provides pertinent information to the fleet through a series of messages and emails, a transition webpage, and *Plain Talk for Sailors* bulletins.

Military Life Cycle Transition Model

TAP incorporates career readiness and transition preparation into the entire continuum of a Sailor's career. In the past, transition and preparation for the civilian workforce occurred late in a Sailor's military service – just prior to separation. Under this enhanced program, these concepts are incorporated earlier to ensure that counseling, assessments, and access to resources that build skills or establish credentials, occur earlier in a Sailor's military career.

Navy leverages the Navy Retention and Career Development program, designed to improve Sailors' ability to achieve their professional goals, to facilitate the military life cycle. Individual Career Development Plans are created, based upon Career Roadmaps for each enlisted rating, with assistance from Navy Command Career Counselors. Rating Roadmaps include information on skill training, job description, personal and professional development, Career Development Boards, Navy qualifications and certifications, civilian occupations, Navy Credentialing Opportunities On-line (Navy COOL), United Services Military Apprenticeship Program (USMAP), Professional Military Education (PME), and Voluntary Education.

Navy incorporates aspects of the *Transition GPS* curriculum into our Career Development Boards, which are routinely held during key points in a Sailor's career. Aligning these key activities with pre-determined "touch points" facilitates individualized attention, together with instruction, resources, and services to build the skills necessary for each Sailor to meet their professional goals throughout their military career and beyond. Additionally, embedding touch points across the military lifecycle is particularly helpful in addressing at-risk

Sailors who may require a higher level of support in meeting their goals. For example, we ensure that Sailors:

(1) are registered for, and know about, *eBenefits*, a joint VA/Department of Defense (DoD) web portal that provides resources and self-service capabilities to veterans, Service members, and their families; to research, access, and manage their VA military benefits and personal information;

(2) are informed about VA benefits for which they are eligible while serving on active duty, as well as after they depart the service as Navy veterans; and

(3) understand the importance of maintaining their personnel records, and obtaining credentials and certifications they have earned for skills obtained while serving in the Navy.

The Career Development Program is a key component of transition. Essentially, a Sailor's Individual Career Development plan becomes their Individual Career Transition Plan.

Education and Credentialing Opportunities

While serving on active duty, Sailors are encouraged to take advantage of programs that acknowledge military training and experience. Navy COOL supports Navy's career development and transition programs by helping Sailors gain civilian certifications and licenses for skills or academic degrees acquired during their service. This helps translate each Sailor's

military training and experience into concrete documentation that prospective employers can easily recognize, and which demonstrates that a Sailor's skills are commensurate with, or exceed, those of their civilian counterparts. At least one certification is currently available in each of the 81 Navy enlisted ratings, as well as collateral duty and leadership occupations, with over 1,900 credentialing opportunities. Since program inception in October 2007, Navy COOL has provided support on over 165,000 certifications and licenses for over 55,000 Sailors in every enlisted rating and pay grade. Navy also participates in the USMAP, which is a formal military training program that provides Sailors the opportunity to improve their job skills and complete civilian apprenticeship requirements while on active duty.

In addition to the aforementioned programs, Navy funds educational opportunities that enhance post-military job-ready skills, and encourages transitioning Sailors to take full advantage of their GI Bill, and other education benefits, while serving on active duty. Many Sailors are enrolled in college, and some have already earned college degrees. Those interested in pursuing their education goals are strongly encouraged to attend the specialized Accessing Higher Education or Career and Technical Training track. Specifically, Sailors are briefed on these tracks during *Transition GPS* workshop, and required Pre-separation Counseling.

Employment Skills Training

Navy encourages commanders, commanding officers and officers-in-charge, when operational commitments permit, to authorize eligible Sailors to pursue employment skills training during their final 180 days of active duty service using the DoD *SkillBridge* initiative.

Navy has 16 programs with eight additional programs in the planning stages for fiscal year 2018. As of June 2017, 158 Navy personnel have completed *SkillBridge* programs with a job placement rate of 65 percent.

Programs such as Onward-to-Opportunity (O2O) provide up to eight weeks of training for in-demand fields such as cybersecurity and software engineering. The O2O program is hosted at three Navy locations (Norfolk, VA; Jacksonville, FL; and San Diego, CA) with plans to expand. Navy is partnering with Microsoft and Amazon to provide employment skills training programs for fiscal year 2018, at various locations throughout the Navy enterprise, such as Gulfport, MS; Pensacola, FL; and Ventura County, CA.

Veterans-in-piping (VIP) Pre-Apprenticeship at Naval Station, Norfolk, is considered a best practice program for DoD *SkillBridge*. The VIP is designed to fill a critical workforce need for welders in the Norfolk and Hampton Roads, VA, area and involves 18 continuous weeks of full-time classroom and on-the-job training sessions.

Government Accountability Office (GAO) Report

Navy largely concurs with recommendations included in the draft GAO Report: “*Transitioning Veterans – DoD Needs to Improve Performance Reporting and Monitoring for the Transition Assistance Program*,” and already has several programs in place to support them, such as TAP requirements compliance-reporting at the unit level. With regard to the specific GAO recommendations:

GAO Recommendation 1: *We recommend that the Secretary of Defense publicly report DOD's performance and career readiness attainment for all TAP-eligible service members and members of the National Guard and Reserve rather than exclude those for whom data are missing or clarify the extent of missing data.*

Navy monitors compliance for Sailors with complete transition data and those with missing data, and continues to work to reduce the prevalence of missing data. We continue to see improvement in our Sailors meeting Veterans Opportunity to Work to Hire Heroes (VOW) Act requirements compliance. In fiscal year 2017, from October to August, total VOW Act compliance for Navy active and reserve Sailors was 84 percent. Naval Audit Service is conducting an audit of TAP reporting to assist us in our compliance efforts.

GAO Recommendation 2: *We recommend that the Secretary of Defense monitor and report on the extent to which service members participate in TAP within prescribed timeframes.*

Navy will work with OSD to monitor and report Sailor completion of TAP requirements with the goal of driving earlier completion of TAP requirements and capturing short-notice separation data. Additionally, with the electronic Pre-Separation Counseling Checklist (DD Form 2648) and the TAP tracking system that we recently introduced, commanders have new tools to ensure compliance.

GAO Recommendation 3: *We recommend that the Secretary of Defense monitor and report on the extent to which service members who elect to receive supplementary 2-day classes are able to receive training.*

Navy policy mandates Sailor participation in these 2-day classes if required for a Sailor to meet his or her specific career readiness standards.

GAO Recommendation 4: *We recommend that the Secretary of Defense monitor and report on the extent which service members attend TAP in a classroom setting unless allowed by regulation to participate online.*

Navy is committed to providing in-person, instructor-led, training as the primary means of delivery, as evidenced by the 1,300 classes attended by over 42,000 Sailors this fiscal year.

GAO Recommendation 5: *We recommend that once DoD monitors and reports data timeliness, 2-day classes, and the use of online TAP, enable unit commander and high-level commanders to access this information to help ensure the specific units they oversee and are compliant with all TAP requirements.*

Navy has an information system in place to allow commanders to monitor TAP requirements compliance, and will continue to enhance this capability as the means to collect and track any new requirements.

GAO recommendation 6: *We recommend that the Secretary of Defense seek ways to minimize the subjectivity involved in career readiness determinations, particularly when judgements are involved, such as the quality of the individual transition plan and the résumé.*

This could include developing guidance on training that provides quality standards for assessing readiness materials.

Navy will work with partner agencies to minimize subjectivity, for instance, by developing guidance on quality standards. Our Fleet and Family Support Center staff is trained in career readiness standard items, such as résumé-writing, and hosts the Capstone event to review career readiness standards. Agency partners also are available to assist Sailors and commanders.

We recognize that there is more to be done, and look forward to working with the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the other Uniformed Services, and partner agencies, to refine and improve the DoD transition process.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss Navy TAP and our continuous efforts to improve support for transitioning Navy veterans, in close cooperation with interagency partners. Each Sailor who selflessly serves our Nation in the all-volunteer force has earned our unwavering commitment to ensuring they possess the tools that position them for success as they transition, and as they continue serving our Nation as honored and distinguished veterans.

We appreciate your steadfast support for all Navy men and women – active, reserve and veteran – and for the programs you authorize that sustain them, and their families, during and following their distinguished careers of voluntary service to the Navy and our Nation.